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"I'm declaring an emergency": Leadership and the State of Exception in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*

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[1] In *State of Exception*, Giorgio Agamben traces the development of the concept of necessity outside the law, an emergency situation that may require extreme measures and that may justify placing additional powers in the hands of the executive branch, circumventing the agreed-upon procedures of the law. This is not a new concept, and it has been familiar in the West since ancient Rome, following the ancient maxim "necessity has no law" (Agamben 1). The state of exception is useful in situations of foreign attack, siege, or other emergency when there is no time to follow the established legislative procedures, and when the nation is best served by transferring all power into the hands of the executive branch, or even a single leader, and limiting (temporarily) the rights of the citizens in order to preserve their way of life. Agamben notes that this strategy is acceptable if it is used only in situations of actual, immediate emergency and only if it is enforced temporarily. Historically, however, there have been many cases when a state of exception has been declared without the presence of any real or immediate danger. For example, Napoleon's decree of December 24, 1811 "provided for the possibility of a state of siege that the emperor could declare whether or not a city was actually under attack" (Agamben, *State* 4). In such cases, declaring a state of emergency is often used to deal with internal turmoil rather than an external threat. Agamben also notes that the state of exception is often used today on a permanent basis, rather than as a short-term emergency measure, and that "the state of exception tends increasingly to appear as the dominant paradigm of government in contemporary politics" (*State* 2). This is worrisome, because historically, this kind of situation allows for the emergence of dictatorships, since it functions as "a transitional phase that leads inevitably to the establishment of a totalitarian regime" (*State* 15). The state of exception short-circuits the legal and political provisions that would normally ensure that power is not misused, and in extreme cases may lead to an internal collapse of the

system while supposedly protecting it from external threats. As Agamben notes, "Hitler could probably not have taken power had the country not been under a regime of presidential dictatorship for nearly three years and had parliament been functioning" (*State* 15).

[2] Within the context of Western democracies, the state of exception means that the separation of power is undermined, and the executive institution (for example, the president) can issue decrees that have the power of law, effectively replacing the democratic procedures: "The expression *full powers* (*pleins pouvoirs*), which is sometimes used to characterize the state of exception, refers to the expansion of the powers of the government, and in particular the conferral on the executive of the power to issue decrees having the force of law" (Agamben, *State* 5). Contemporary democracies are at risk of weakening their legislative structures and human rights traditions if they resort to this power not only in rare emergency situations but as part of the routine functioning of the system: "the voluntary creation of a permanent state of emergency (though perhaps not declared in the technical sense) has become one of the essential practices of contemporary states, including the so-called democratic ones" (Agamben, *State* 2).

[3] Unlike other television shows (most notably *24*, which has been discussed in this context by Cormac Deane), *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* is not centered around a single character continuously taking executive, unlawful measures (e.g., killing or torturing humans) in order to ward off a greater danger. However, the position of the Slayer is by definition outside the law (as pointed out by critics such as Brannon, Clark & Miller, Ruddell, and McClelland) because traditional institutions are either corrupted/evil or irrelevant in the fight against supernatural forces. Clark and Miller, for example, argue that authority leads to corruption and monstrosity, and "authorities are there to be subverted, overcome, or ignored" (par. 9), and McClelland speaks of "a general dissatisfaction with the outcomes of the sanctioned legal system" (para 3), explaining that "[d]estruction of vampires by ritual means … is a legitimate obligation, which must take place outside the law because the very power of these evil beings allows them to go undetected by ordinary mortals" (par. 32). Ruddell and Bradney also talk

about the uselessness of the police, and how the Scoobies break the laws "for the greater good."

[4] Faith's pronouncement "we are the law" ("Consequences," 3.15), echoed in Buffy's "I am the law" ("Selfless," 7.5), expresses the Slayer's supreme power that overrides ordinary human considerations. The justification of this power, when it infringes upon human law, is taking action "for the greater good." However, the idea that the law can be suspended and human rights ignored out of necessity and "for the greater good" is what motivates the state of exception, and therefore the idea must be applied carefully. There are various examples in *BtVS* of individuals being sacrificed for the greater good, and we can see that these actions are never fully embraced by the overall philosophy of the series. We do not generally side with Faith when she "contends that Slayers do so much good for humankind that, in the balance, the death of one innocent bystander hardly matters" (Richardson and Rabb, par. 12). A similar argument is presented by Spike in "Dead Things" (6.13), when he is desperately trying to convince Buffy not to turn herself in for the murder of Warren's ex-girlfriend:

> BUFFY: A girl is dead because of me.
> SPIKE: And how many people are alive because of you? How many have you saved? One dead girl doesn't tip the scale.

[5] The philosophy that Spike proposes here is one that, as Julie Brannon points out, is also used by the Watchers' Council: "Risking individual lives for an abstract goal is the Council's modus operandi, right down to the creation of the First Slayer" (par. 2). In this sense, all Slayers would appear to be victims of this strategy, since their personal lives have been superseded and ultimately sacrificed for a higher goal from the moment of their birth and without their active or informed consent. However, once Buffy breaks her ties with the Council—once she stops being chosen and starts to choose—she in fact becomes the decision-maker in the war against supernatural evil. But the show suggests that even as a leader and sole protector of the human way of life against encroaching non-human threats, she should not be exempt from human laws. The Scoobies discuss this issue in "Ted" (2.11), when Buffy appears to have killed a human being, before

they discover that Ted is in fact a robot. The dialogue again reinforces the notion that a leader exempt from laws can exist only in a totalitarian regime.

> CORDELIA: I don't get it. Buffy's the Slayer. Shouldn't she have ...
> XANDER: What? A license to kill?
> CORDELIA: Well, not for fun. But she's like this superman. Shouldn't there be different rules for her?
> WILLOW: Sure, in a Fascist society.
> CORDELIA: Right! Why can't we have one of those?

[6] When a ruler is outside the law, the status of the citizens also changes. In *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Lif*e, Agamben postulates that absolute power places the subjects outside the law as well, reducing them to a state of "bare life," in which they have lost all their civil rights and retain only the attribute of physical existence unregulated by law and therefore legally expendable. They become what Agamben calls "*homo sacer*," someone who, instead of being punished by society, is banished from society and can be killed at will, without this killing constituting homicide or being punishable by law. In effect, *homo sacer* occupies an indeterminate space between life and death, so that killing him (to use the gender of the Latin) does not essentially change his legal status but returns him to an already given state, where physical death simply reflects and confirms the truth of his legal death. The life of *homo sacer* "is defined solely by virtue of having entered into an intimate symbiosis with death without, nevertheless, belonging to the world of the deceased. … [W]e find ourselves confronted with a bare life that has been separated from its context and that, so to speak surviving its death, is for this very reason incompatible with the human world" (99-100). Examples from ancient folklore of such a being that is banned from human society include the wolf-man (or werewolf), "who is precisely *neither man nor beast*, and who dwells paradoxically within both while belonging to neither" (105). This presence of the beast in the human, or more generally the "survival of the state of nature at the very heart of the state" (106), parallels the state of exception, where all human law is suspended in order for humans to deal with (presumably) an immediate threat to their physical survival, reacting to that threat in a physical manner

akin to that of beasts. The sovereign, the ruler who declares himself outside the law, is the one who can legitimize this violence, since "the sovereign is the point of indistinction between violence and law, the threshold on which violence passes over into law and law passes over into violence" (32). By setting himself apart from the law, the sovereign can legitimize violence that would otherwise be unlawful: "in the state of exception, it is impossible to distinguish transgression of the law from execution of the law" (*Homo Sacer* 57).

[7] The Slayer is, by definition, the one who commits acts of violence that are neither justifiable nor punishable by society's laws, because the Slayer exists at the limit between the human world and the supernatural world—and in fact the Slayer's violence is necessary to maintain this limit and ensure the operation of human law and the survival of human society. The violence of the Slayer is justified because it is done on behalf of a society which is founded on a lack of any awareness of the supernatural threat that would justify using violence against it—and therefore the violence can never be justified, except by the executive decision of the Slayer herself. If we seek justification of the Slayer's violence from human law, we must admit that this violence is neither justified nor unjustified. It is simply unacknowledged by the law, because it does not exist within the social space governed by the law.

[8] It is perhaps obvious to note that in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* the status of vampires and demons is that of *homo sacer*, since they are banished from human society without rights, and killing them does not invoke any form of punishment, since it is not considered homicide. Indeed, there are times when Buffy must fight with Giles or Xander in order to defend her choice of *not* killing certain vampires (Angel, Spike). Problems arise not when vampires are killed (after all, they are already dead), but when there are reasons not to kill them. The line between humans and non-humans is the boundary between human law and Buffy's authority. However, this line is often blurred when some humans are presented as demonic and evil and, conversely, when some non-humans display human qualities (Spike, Harmony, Clem). The relationship between human and non-human becomes even more complicated in the case of Anya, when Buffy points out that Anya has consciously made a decision to become a demon (twice), so that when

Buffy claims the authority to use her Slayer power against Anya, she is in fact seeking to punish not just the actions of a demon, but also the choice made by a human being to become a demon capable of those actions. Such complications are never resolved or simplified, and in these cases Buffy is the one who must decide what falls within the right of the Slayer, and what should be left to human law to deal with.

[9] While Buffy has no legal authority or special standing within human society (as far as society is concerned, she is just a schoolgirl, then a college student, and finally a worker in the fast food industry and a part-time school counselor), she does have authority when it comes to supernatural matters. It is true that the fight against supernatural evil has its own rules and procedures, embodied by the Watchers' Council, and when Buffy becomes a Slayer, she is supposed to follow the rules designed for Slayers and handed down over generations. This legacy is heavily scripted, and it is not accidental that the hub of all Scooby activity for a long time is the library, where ancient books and manuscripts tell Buffy not only how to kill different types of demons, but also why, recording the details of the specific threats posed by different demon species. The piles of books embody the multiple rules set in place for the training and initiation of the Slayer that the Watchers' Council follows strictly. As McClelland observes, "At the very center of *BtVS* is an occult library, and in those obscure books which no one read anyway are to be found the reasons why Buffy is allowed to get away with murder" (par. 33). However, Buffy's interpretation of the Slayer's function is less scripted that other Slayers' (she never even got the Slayer handbook), and she is rarely the one who actually reads the books. If Buffy finds justification for her own actions, it is not from the books or the Council. While she submits unquestioningly to the letter of human law, to the extent that human law applies to her activities (for example, in the homicide cases of Ted and Katrina), she often rejects the legislative procedures of the Watchers' Council and, at times, even the guidance of her own "council" of Scoobies. When Buffy is a good leader, she does listen to the advice of her friends (and even of her enemies, such as Spike's insight into what enables Slayers to let themselves be killed), but when she makes executive decisions and claims absolute authority, she stands apart from all established sources that legitimize the Slayer's power. In the eyes of the Watchers' Council, the

Slayer may be a tool, an expendable pawn in the fight against evil (or, if we go back to the First Slayer, a helpless girl whose power is proportional to the degree to which she is submissive to authority and capable of being taken over physically by a demon), but in the eyes of Buffy, the Slayer is capable of assuming sovereignty above and beyond the limits set by her ancient legacy. What enables Buffy to reject the authority of the Council is her physical power (precisely the beastly part of the otherwise social human being, the part that remains unlegislated), because she realizes that the Council needs her for its own physical survival, since the watchers cannot fight the great evil that encroaches upon the social order. The watchers can issue orders and make up rules (though mostly they appear preoccupied with writing academic papers), but the Slayer alone has the physical power to decide life and death in circumstances where human laws do not apply, and she alone can justify physical violence when it supersedes human rules. In this sense, the Slayer stands apart even from the Council, and if her actions are to be justifiable (as she often feels the need for them to be), then she is the only one who can justify them.

[10] Occasionally even members of the Scooby gang take power into their own hands, assuming initiative, if not exactly leadership, and this move is seemingly justified because lives are at stake and there is no time to discuss their ideas with Buffy and formulate an official, Scooby-licensed course of action (cf. the constantly ticking clock in *24* that reminds us of the urgency of the situation and gives the hero a reprieve from the ordinary necessities of the law). Sometimes decisions need to be made in the moment, and they are not always the decisions that people would agree upon within the context of an extended political debate, where all angles can be carefully considered. And yet, we feel uncomfortable with these decisions. Perhaps the most poignant example is Giles's murder of Ben in season 5. We understand why he does it, and perhaps even that this action is necessary: "It's a morally ambiguous act—like many such acts on Buffy—but a necessary one" (Riess, par. 22). But we also know that the action has been already discussed and dismissed by the Scoobies, when Xander says, "What about Ben? He could be killed, right? I mean, I know he's an innocent, but, you know, not like Dawn-innocent. We could kill a ... a regular guy" ("The Gift," 5.22). But it is clear that they cannot, and they do not agree to do this.

When Giles takes matters into his own hands (in a rational, calm, academic act of torture, reminiscent of the way he beats up Ethan in "Halloween" [2.6]), he does it for the greater good, much like Jack Bauer in *24* goes off on his own, usually against explicit orders issued by his own organization (in Giles's case, the Scoobies), in order to save lives. It is the familiar fantasy of the lone hero who must bear the burden of having done things that others would not do and yet things that are emphatically necessary. Before the big fight with Glory, Giles says to Buffy: "I love Dawn . . . but I've sworn to protect this sorry world, and sometimes that means saying and doing what other people can't. They shouldn't have to" ("The Gift," 5.22). However, *BtVS* turns this rhetoric around when Giles explains to Ben that Buffy could never kill him, because this is not what heroes do. The heroic thing is not to do what no one else can (e.g., be prepared to commit murder when necessary), but, faced with extreme circumstances, to do what everyone else does under normal circumstances (avoid violence against human beings). When *BtVS* puts its characters in a position to use unsanctioned but necessary violence in order to save lives, it is careful to present them not as heroes but as people who are making unilateral decisions and committing violent acts in the dark, alone.

[11] As a whole, we see that the show does not embrace the rhetoric of justifying violence with "the greater good," and sometimes this is presented in a humorous way, as in Willow's justification of Angel kissing Faith in "Earshot" (3.18), when he is forced to pretend he is Angelus in order to get crucial information from Faith about the Mayor's plans. Angel's performance is so convincing that Buffy feels real pain watching him kiss Faith. Trying to make Buffy feel better, Willow says, unconvincingly, "He only kissed her for the greater good." There is no question that Angel's actions are necessary, but we (and Willow) are left with the uncomfortable feeling that they still require justification, above and beyond that of "the greater good." And while this time the discrepancy between the actions and their justification is merely uncomfortable and humorous, the same excuse is used at other times and with higher stakes to justify reducing the individual to a pawn in the service of an abstract goal. Much more serious is the willingness of Robin Wood to kill Spike in "Lies My Parents Told Me" (7.17): "I'm talking about what needs to be done. For the greater good, Giles. You

know I'm right." Even though he is able to see through Wood's skewed motivation of a personal vendetta against Spike, Giles seems to buy into that argument, in a way continuing on his own the Council's original mandate of upholding the abstract purity of a "good" that may, often brutally, flatten out any individual nuances of good and evil. To convince Buffy that Spike is a threat and must be sacrificed for the safety of everyone else, Giles attempts to build an argument by relying on military tropes: "We're on the verge of war. It's time you looked at the big picture. . . . If you're going to be a general, you need to be able to make difficult decisions regardless of the cost." That may be true, but the hypothetical "big picture" here is used merely to draw attention away from giving due consideration to the very real and specific case of Spike's fate. In this instance, Giles wants to deal with internal trouble (Spike), and he justifies it with rhetoric about an external threat (war). It is interesting that back in season 3, Faith also urges Buffy to look at the big picture and accept the violence that the Slayer inevitably resorts to: "You're still not seeing the big picture, B. Something made us different. We're warriors. We're built to kill" ("Consequences" 3.15). Implicit in Faith's view from the beginning is the belief that the adrenaline of violence, the animal rush of the kill, and the constant possibility of death give an urgency to enjoying all the pleasures of life, and this urgency is what justifies breaking the rules (sure, under normal circumstances you'd have to take that chemistry test, but what if you die tomorrow, sacrificing yourself for the good of humanity? Who can set any limits to letting you enjoy life today?). While Faith does not acknowledge society's rules, she also does not appear to have established a stable moral code of her own. However, Buffy is not convinced by the rhetoric of either Giles or Faith—a rhetoric which in both cases is based on a sense of externally motivated urgency—and she looks instead to her own internal sense of right and wrong as a guideline in making difficult decisions.

[12] It is not a coincidence that the claim to absolute power, as Agamben points out, is often made by using the rhetoric of war in order to create a sense of urgency where there is none. His analysis suggests that this is increasingly the case in Western democracies today: "Because the sovereign power of the president is essentially grounded in the emergency linked to a state of war, over the course of the twentieth century the

metaphor of war becomes an integral part of the presidential political vocabulary whenever decisions considered to be of vital importance are being imposed" (*State* 21). In *BtVS*, we notice that most of season 7 is cast in those military terms, and Buffy's (temporary) descent into a "state of exception" mode is evident in her speech, with lines such as "I'm declaring an emergency" and "from now on I'm your leader as in 'Do what I say'" ("Get It Done," 7.15), or "Look, I wish this could be a democracy. I really do. But democracies don't win battles" and the blunt "you have to fall in line" ("Empty Places," 7.19). When she adopts this dictatorial language of war, however, she is not presented as a hero but rather as a failed leader, and she is eventually cast out of her own home by her own friends. Instead of becoming a dictator, she becomes an outcast. Subsequent events show that the problem is not in her ideas or her plans for action (she was right to go back to the vineyard, after all, and in her absence the group of Potentials slips into inefficient democracy until Faith steps in to assume leadership), but the problem is precisely in the rhetoric that accompanies these actions, the way Buffy is cutting herself off from the others, disregarding their "legislative" debates and concerns and claiming absolute executive power. In the words of Clark and Miller, "Buffy is chastised for trying to handle things by herself" (par. 26). It is true, however, that the Slayer is always set apart from others, and the loneliness of the Slayer is a theme that runs throughout the show—the First Slayer speaks of it, and later both Dracula and Caleb sense the loneliness that comes with her power. The Slayer exists outside society, symmetrically banned from ordinary human experience the way *homo sacer* is (and we can recall how many times Buffy gives voice to her desire to be just a normal girl). Paradoxically, the one who has the executive power to ban is just as banned, which is what enables this kind of power in the first place. It is this banishment from human society that allows the Slayer—indeed, requires the Slayer—to take measures that would not be lawful if they fell within the jurisdiction of human law. Being outside the law is the Slayer's legacy and inalienable right.

[13] When Buffy declares an emergency in "Get It Done" (7.15), she resorts to this hereditary right of the Slayer, breaking open the "emergency kit" that belongs to the institution of the Slayer and has been passed down for generations. When Robin Wood gives her the bag that belonged to his

mother, he does it because he feels that his personal, sentimental reasons for holding on to it should be overridden by the greater necessity of the war they are about to fight:

> WOOD: This is going to get bigger than me.
> BUFFY: Yeah, it is.
> WOOD: That's why I've decided to give you this.
> BUFFY: What is it?
> WOOD: An emergency kit. This bag belonged to my mother.

Robin's words and actions here acknowledge the unique power of the Slayer, but also the distance that the Slayer always keeps from other people (including the distance between Robin and his mother). Even though he feels a strong personal connection to the bag as a memento of his mother, he knows that it does not belong to him. It is not a personal possession, but an item that stands outside such notions as "personal possessions." The real use of the emergency kit can only be realized by the Slayer. Even though anyone can open the box (and presumably anyone can read the ancient instructions, since the words instantly make themselves intelligible to Dawn when she starts translating them), there is only one person who can declare an emergency, and that is the sovereign who, by making that declaration, sets herself apart from human society and therefore has authority over the things that human society would not acknowledge.

[14] Buffy accepts this legacy, and the responsibility that comes with it—and part of the legacy is the right or indeed the expectation to use the emergency power that is available to the Slayer. However, she is not happy with the prospect of fighting this war alone. The harsh language of war in season 7 in fact begins with "Get It Done" (7.15), when Buffy criticizes her friends for not using their powers: "I use the power that I have. The rest of you are just waiting for me." The "emergency" that Buffy declares has to do with what she sees as inaction and weakness in everyone else (including Willow and Spike, who are afraid to use their powers). Rather than an immediate external threat, the emergency in this case is the internal lack of action within the Scooby ranks, and the "threat" that Buffy sees is that she will be left alone to make decisions and take initiative in the upcoming war,

which will hurt their chances of winning. In this sense, her descent into a state of exception begins as an attempt to urge the others to use their power, rather than an attempt to claim more power for herself. Ironically, even though this is the episode where Buffy declares an emergency (that is, assumes executive power), it is also the moment when she refuses additional power to be vested in her by the men who created the First Slayer. Instead, she looks for ways to find power outside herself, forcing the others to work together, to challenge themselves, and to assume more responsibility in order to bring her back from the desert where the emergency kit sends her. By stepping through the portal opened by the emergency kit, Buffy makes herself physically unavailable to help the others, withholding her Slayer power, which forces them to fill in this gap—not with debates and discussions, but with physical action (including violence) that they must initiate and assume responsibility for. In the end, the emergency kit is not really used according to its purpose. Instead of accepting the additional demon power that is given to the Slayer by right in situations of emergency—a power that would presumably give her a better chance to defeat the evil by herself—Buffy decides to remain more human and less demon (more social and less physical) and in fact enables the others to claim and use their own power.

[15] It is true that the situation near the end of season 7, as on many previous occasions, is indeed critical (possibly apocalyptic), and the "good guys" need to be as efficient as possible, but unilateral power turns out to be counter-productive and philosophically unjustifiable. Even as leaders, the characters in *BtVS* must work together in order to legitimize their decisions. As Rhonda Wilcox has pointed out, "from the start, the series counterbalances the idea of the lonely hero with the presentation of a community of friends" (4). It is only when Buffy learns to share her power that she has a real chance of winning: "Buffy offers another way, one that she has learned over and over again is the only way to be strong: to share the power, to rely on others" (Brannon, par. 13). Clark and Miller also identify Buffy's ability to build a network of friends and allies as a factor in redeeming the Slayer power, which may otherwise become unilateral and unjustified: "Part of the reason that Buffy does not 'go over to the Dark Side' is because she is not alone. Giles and the Scooby Gang provide a support

network for the Slayer" (par. 26). The difference between social consensus and individual power can easily become the difference between good and evil. As Clark and Miller observe, "authority becomes corrupted and monstrous (literally) when it abuses its power or seeks power as an end itself" (par. 30). Even when presenting its characters with truly exceptional, urgent, apocalyptic situations, *BtVS* does not embrace the "state of exception" as a solution but offers a different and more complex understanding of what constitutes necessary violence.

[16] Emergency is by definition an objective situation that requires an immediate response from the subject. But this response must be grounded in and guided by values and goals that are internal and long-term, rather than simply resorting to the first available impulsive reaction. The action that is prompted by the emergency must be more deeply motivated by the moral code or ethical program that the hero subscribes to in general, not simply in that specific moment. To the extent that his actions are disconnected from his larger worldview, the hero fails at the task of saving the world or even saving himself *as* a hero, and simply reacts to a historical contingency. What threatens the hero's power and legitimacy is not the external threat itself, but the hero's own reaction to the moment, when this reaction is cut off from the enabling logic of his long-term fight against evil. Ultimately, the hero is someone who leads others, positively, toward a goal, rather than someone who reacts, negatively, to concrete threats. "We are doing what we can do quickly and consciously or unconsciously paying the price" (3), Anthony Cordesman observes about the way in which the U.S. approaches biological threats in the immediate aftermath of 9/11. Rushing to respond to threats can produce a response that is chaotic and not necessarily grounded in a sustainable long-term strategy. As Cordesman points out, an unplanned, improvised response to a large-scale attack is likely to misplace or exhaust the available resources, while a long-term integrated approach that builds on and strengthens peacetime infrastructure would enable society to respond better to threats that cannot be predicted. And this is true of moral resources as well as of economic or military resources. Deciding what constitutes good and evil at the last moment before acting upon those definitions would appear to be a weaker strategy than having a consistent system of values that applies equally to situations of war and times of peace.

Faced with a long-term prospect of continuous, varied, and unpredictable threats (after all, as we see in *BtVS*, the end of the world is not something that just happens once), the hero is not someone who wields absolute power in a moment of crisis, but rather someone who builds meaningful, bilateral relationships and has a long-term vision about the path that humanity should take and the values that it should embrace.

[17] Ultimately, as a leader and a hero, Buffy has decided that there is something she would not sacrifice for the greater good—that she would not kill Dawn to save the world, or even kill Ben—even if the very existence of the greater good is being threatened. The exceptional circumstances that would normally be used to justify the extreme measures and unilateral violence characteristic of sovereign power in the state of exception are instead used by the series as a catalyst for strengthening the bonds between Buffy and her friends, and even between Buffy and her own legacy as a Slayer. She always seeks to understand her power and find ways in which that power can be integrated into a larger view of who she is, and what she wants the world to be. And despite her lapses in judgment in season 7, which temporarily alienate her allies, Buffy emerges as a true (and victorious) leader as a result of sharing her power with others. At the end, the Potentials are no longer expendable pawns in a war that is greater than they are, but (choose to) become individuals with the strength to challenge the forces of evil. As a result of her deeper understanding of her own power, Buffy chooses to give up her sovereign status, allowing the Slayer power to be multiplied and infusing society (including situations where society has failed to enforce its own moral code, such as situations of domestic violence, which we glimpse in the series of snapshots showing the awakening of Slayers across the globe) with new physical strength that can no longer be banished from the human world.

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